

Getting Ready for School

A Message from Mark - August 2024

Dear West40 Community,

As we gear up for another school year, I am delighted to extend a warm welcome to all the educators, students, and families across our region. At West40, we are dedicated to supporting our schools in fostering environments where curiosity is ignited, skills are honed, and potential is unlocked. The beginning of a new academic year is a time of renewed hope and endless possibilities, and we are excited to partner with each of you to make this year remarkable.



This year, we are emphasizing the innovative use of technology to enhance educational outcomes, focusing particularly on the responsible use of cell phones and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI). As cell phones continue to play a significant role in our daily lives, we are committed to helping students across our region use them responsibly and effectively in their educational journey. By fostering digital citizenship, we aim to create an atmosphere where technology is a powerful tool for learning rather than a distraction.

The potential of AI in education is another exciting area we are exploring. AI offers the promise of personalized learning experiences, enabling educators to tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. We are excited to support schools in implementing AI-driven tools that can enhance teaching and learning, providing targeted support and enrichment opportunities for all students. Our commitment to innovation ensures that our students are well-prepared for the rapidly changing world they will inherit.

As we embark on this new school year, let us embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead with enthusiasm and determination. With the dedication of our educators, the support of our

families, and the enthusiasm of our students, I am confident that this year will be one of growth, achievement, and joy. Together, let's make this school year an inspiring and successful journey for everyone in our West40 community. Welcome back, and here's to a fantastic year!

Mark

Digital Device Advice for Schools & Parents



Placing restrictions on cell phones is gaining steam in schools across the country. Several states are outright banning phones in classrooms. Supporters argue that by limiting the use of phones during the school day, students will benefit from increased social interaction and less social media-induced anxiety. However, some students will be disappointed by restrictions and some parents may be concerned about how they can communicate with their children in case of schedule changes or emergencies.

According to clinical psychologist and author of *Anything But My Phone, Mom!*, Dr. Roni Cohen-Sandler, part of educating students in the digital age is teaching them how and when to use technology responsibly and safely.

"Neuroscience confirms what parents, teachers, and school administrators see every day: with their still-developing brains, students are vulnerable to overusing or misusing cell phones. Even with enforceable rules in place, kids are distracted in class and teachers are forced to function as phone police," Cohen-Sandler said. "What works best are devices designed for collecting phones when students enter schools."

Cohen-Sandler said when phones or tablets are needed for academic research or other tasks, they should be available and limiting cell phone use in certain situations or in between classes makes sense.

"When they are unnecessary and likely distractions, students should not have access to them. Schools that are considering banning cell phones during lunch, recess, and passing times in hallways should know that once students get used to restrictions (i.e., they no longer go through dopamine withdrawal), they almost always report significant improvements in their lives. They feel happier, less anxious, and more connected to their classmates. Instead of scrolling or texting during lunch, they're actually talking to the kids around them," Cohen-Sandler said.

Cohen-Sandler also said it is extremely important for school leaders to educate parents about how cell phone use affects the development and mental health of young people and also mitigate parents' resistance by addressing how they will be able to get in touch with their students' during the school day if there is a catastrophic event, emergency or a change in schedule or carpool arrangements.

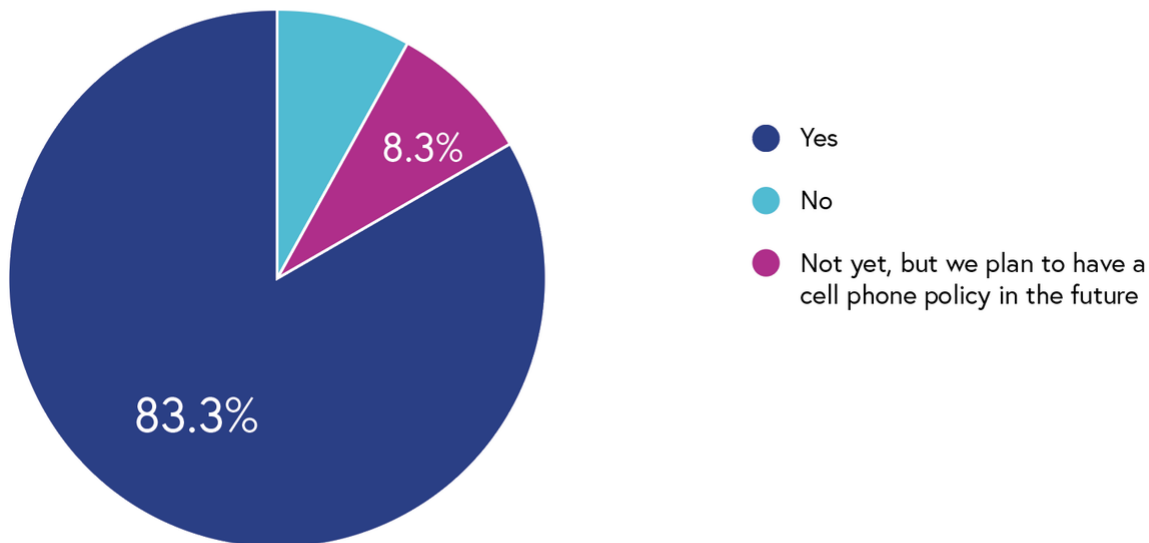
Cohen-Sandler is a featured guest on the most recent episode of West40's podcast, [Shift](#)

[Everything](#). You can learn more about Cohen-Sandler, her work, and her book, *Anything But My Phone, Mom!*, on her [website](#).

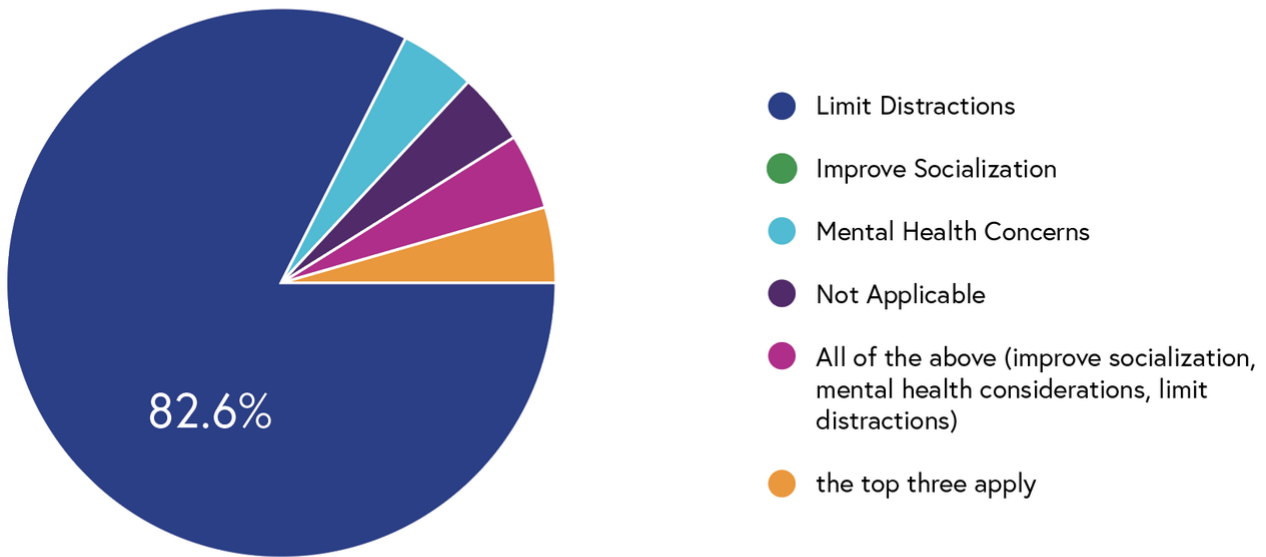
School Cell Phone Policies

Illinois is not one of the states to implement an education-related cell phone ban. But schools across the West40 area are making their own digital device rules in the meantime. We surveyed area superintendents and found the majority of those who responded now have cell phone policies that impact students heading into the new school year.

Does your district have a policy limiting student cell phone usage heading into the new school year? 24 responses



What is the main reason for implementing your district's student cell phone policy?
23 responses



District AI Policy Poll Results

Educators and students are seeing the benefits (and concerns) of an increased reliance on Artificial Intelligence. We surveyed area districts to see if they have a policy on the acceptable usage of AI in the classroom.

Does your district have an Artificial Intelligence policy heading into the new school year?
24 responses

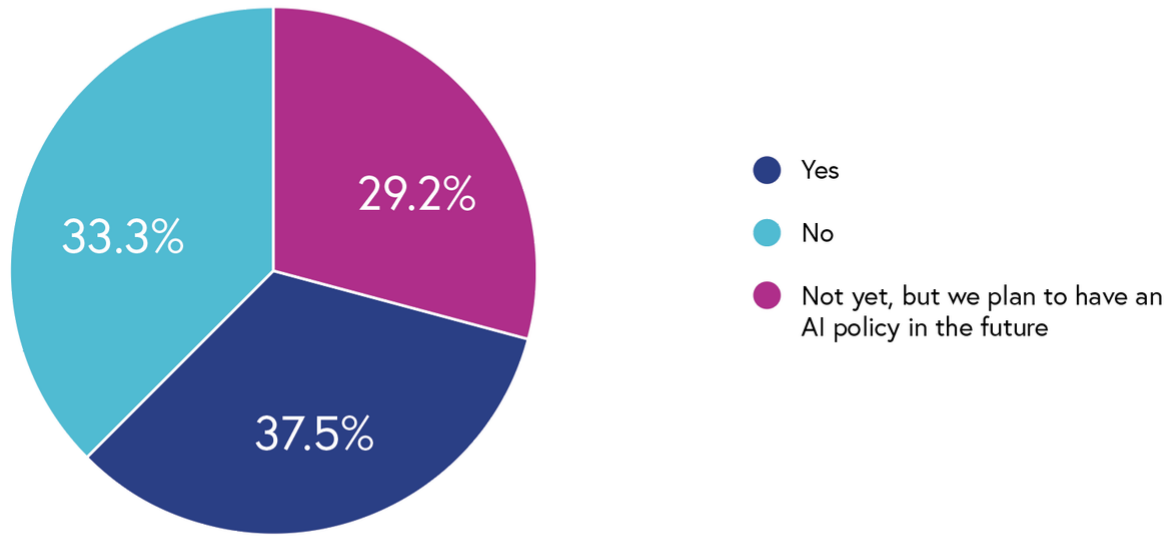


Photo Gallery: West40 Area Districts Preparing for the New School Year



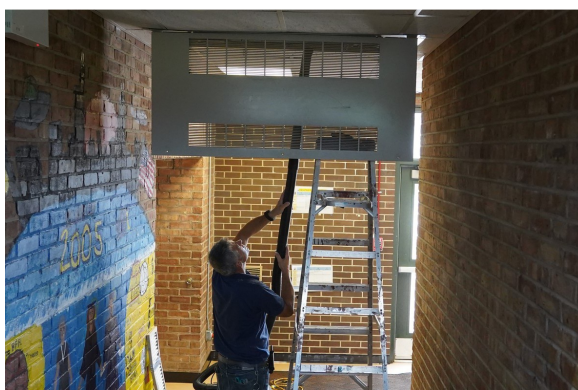
Sidewalk resurfacing in Elmwood Park District 401



Hallway renovation in Lyons Township HS District 204



Classroom prepping in Cicero District 99

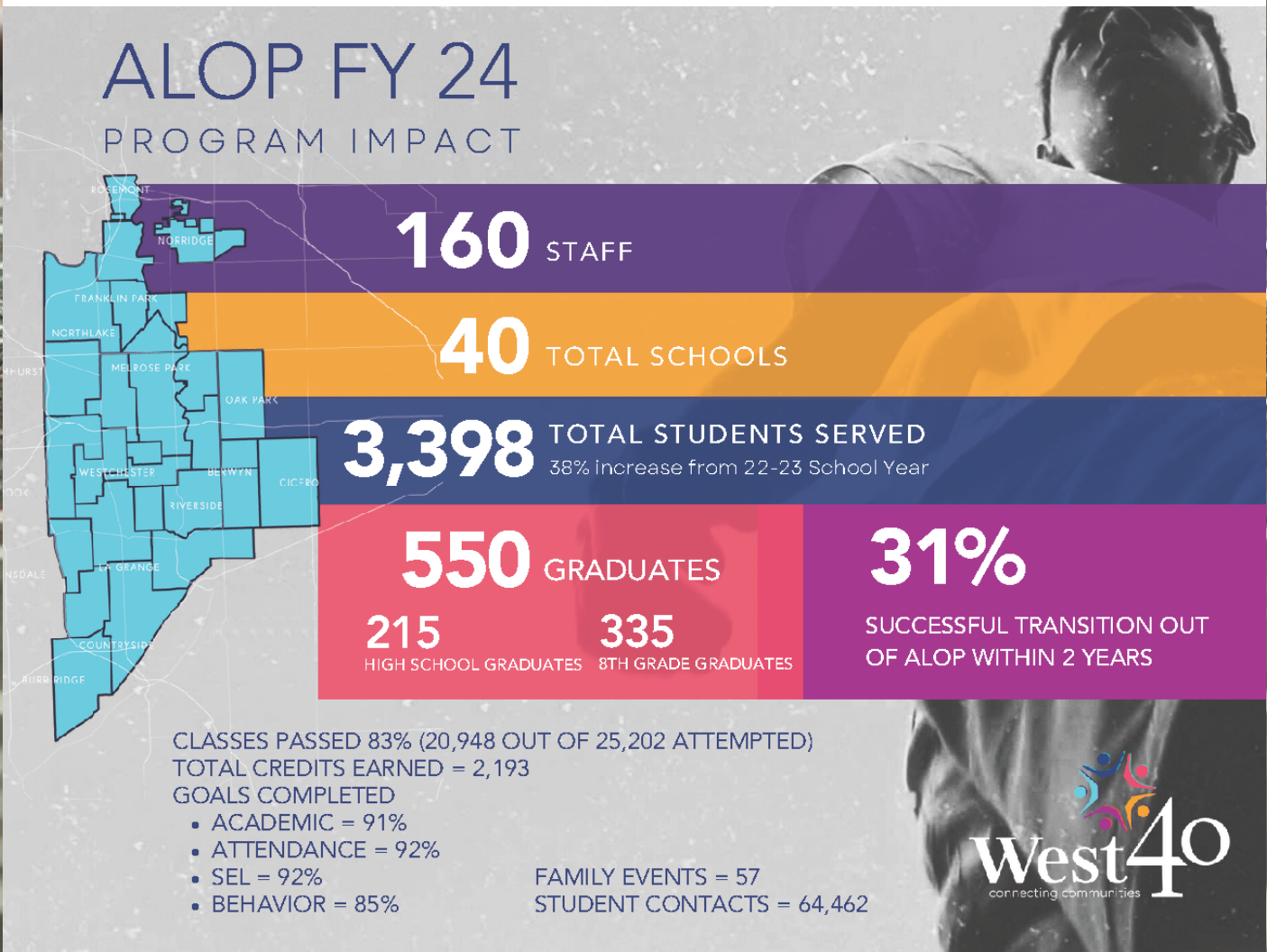


Backpack Giveback Recap!

This year the Backpack Giveback was held August 10th at Morton College, where West40 and Morton College distributed approximately 1,600 backpacks stocked with essential school supplies to area students and their families and caregivers. 41 of our community partner organizations greeted attendees and offered prizes and information about their services. Additionally, 300 backpacks were given away at events in Franklin Park and Berwyn. West40 thanks all volunteers, partners and donors who contributed to the weekend's success!



West40's Final ALOP Numbers from 2023-24 School Year



St. Joseph High School Demolition

West40 is in the process of transforming the south building of the former St. Joseph High School into a state-of-the-art residential school. Meanwhile, the demolition of the north buildings began in early July. See the before and after photos below!



July 8



July 8



July 8



August 7



August 7



August 7

Exploring a Famous CLOSED High School Before its DEMOLITION

WALKING THE HALLS
BEFORE DEMOLITION



The 2024 Illinois School Safety Conference will be held October 2
[REGISTER HERE](#)

Helpful Noteables

Enhance Your School's Safety at NO COST:

West40 is offering safety training at NO COST to public and non-public schools! Be sure to take advantage of 10 hours of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) training so West40 can support and serve your district's approach to school safety. Contact Phil Abraham at pabraham@west40.org to learn more.

Important Reminders for Administrators and Educators:

[Key Dates and Deadlines](#)

[Upcoming AA \(Administrator Academy\) Events](#)

[Mandated Training](#)

[E-Learning Program Verification Form](#)

[Application for Approval of District Institute](#)

Licensure Information:

Educator renewal opened on April 1 and will continue until **Aug. 31** for Professional Educator Licenses, Educator License w/Stipulations/CTEs, and Chief School Business Officials. If your license was due to renew in 2024 and these licenses are not successfully renewed by Aug. 31, they will be changed to **lapsed** status and will not be valid for employment in an Illinois public, charter, or state-operated school. Educators have until Aug. 31 to complete the required PD hours and to renew their license. All substitute and paraprofessional licenses that were not renewed by June 30 have moved to an **invalid** status as of July 1 and are not eligible for employment until renewed. Renewal resources can be found on the Renewal [webpage](#).



West40 Communications Department

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